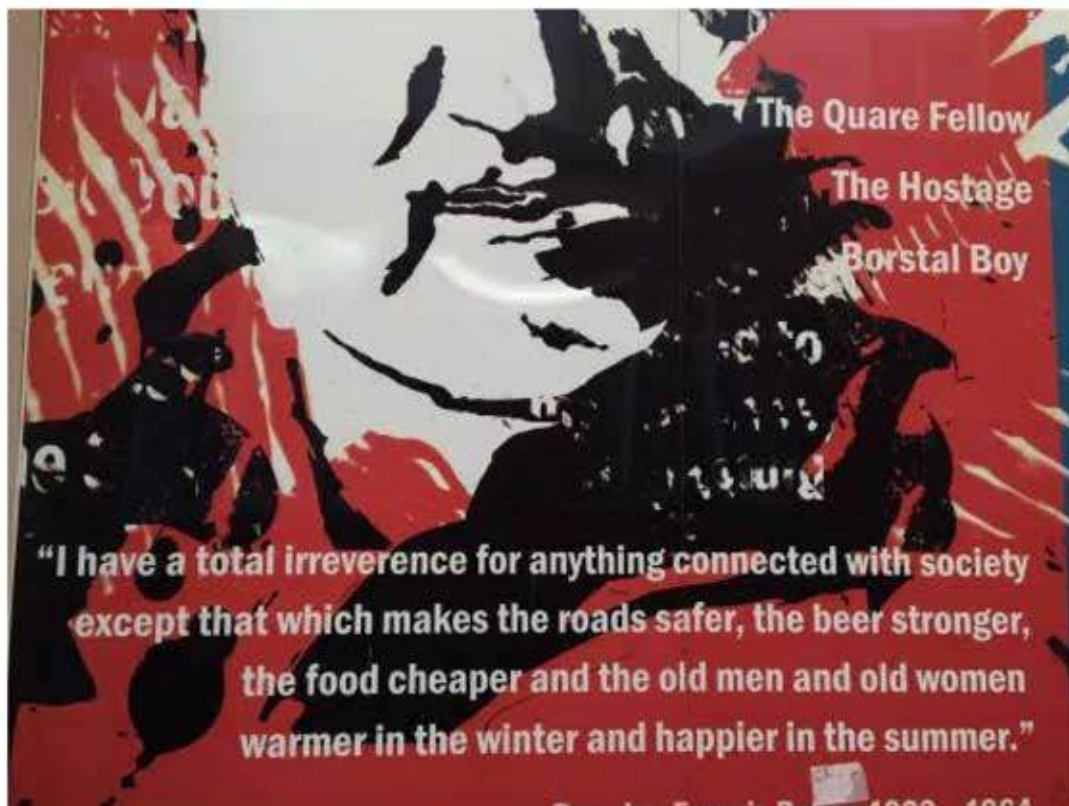


# News Day

JUNE 11, 2015 · 3:22 AM

## Brendan Behan, Dublin and the Minnesota legislature



Brendan Behan's poster on a Dublin alley wall has a message you might want to send to the Minnesota legislature, or the U.S. Congress: "I have a total irreverence for anything connected with society except that which makes the roads safer, the beer stronger, the food cheaper and the old men and old women warmer in the winter and happier in the summer." Roads, anyone? Food stamps? Heating assistance?

History and culture permeate Dublin's streets, lanes and alleys. Brendan Behan's poster is part of the Icon Walk. [The Icon Factory artists' cooperative](#) created this public art in 2010 to celebrate Irish cultural heritage and to reclaim "these neglected crime ridden streets and laneways" in the Temple Bar cultural area. They knew, they said, "that Ireland's economic slump had depressed many of us and we sought to remind people of the riches of our cultural heritage – how we had riches aplenty across our cultural spectrum."



The cultural icons include Maud Gonne, who “opened the door of twentieth century politics to Irish women” and also exemplifies 1920s Irish fashion and artisanship. “We produced great linen, tweed, lace, wool, leather but wore and used them in very conservative ways right up to the sixties when the world changed.”

Another wall is dedicated to “Oddballs, Crackpots and Assorted Genius.” (We have a few of those in Minnesota, too.)



Harry Clarke’s historic stained glass windows, the Icon Factory notes bitterly, are “buried behind bars in a building now in the hands of NAMA, an agency set up to protect the assets of the Irish Nation. They do this by turning the lights off and allowing this cultural treasure to go to seed. Attempts to have it back-lit for you to enjoy fell on deaf ears and we present it now as photographs in an obvious failing attempt to show a modest example of his work.”

Sounds a little like the legislature’s attempts to preserve Minnesota’s natural treasures, by restricting clean water regulations and abolishing the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency Citizen’s Board,

“Feed your head,” exhorts another Icon Walk poster, citing a 20 year study of 27 nations that found, “Whether rich or poor, illiterate or college graduates, parents who have books in the home increase the level of education their children will attain.” The collective insists: “More important than class size, availability of hi-tech equipment, quality of teacher or school, books in the home indicated academic success and a higher level of education. The more books made a difference and the more books, the greater the advantage.”

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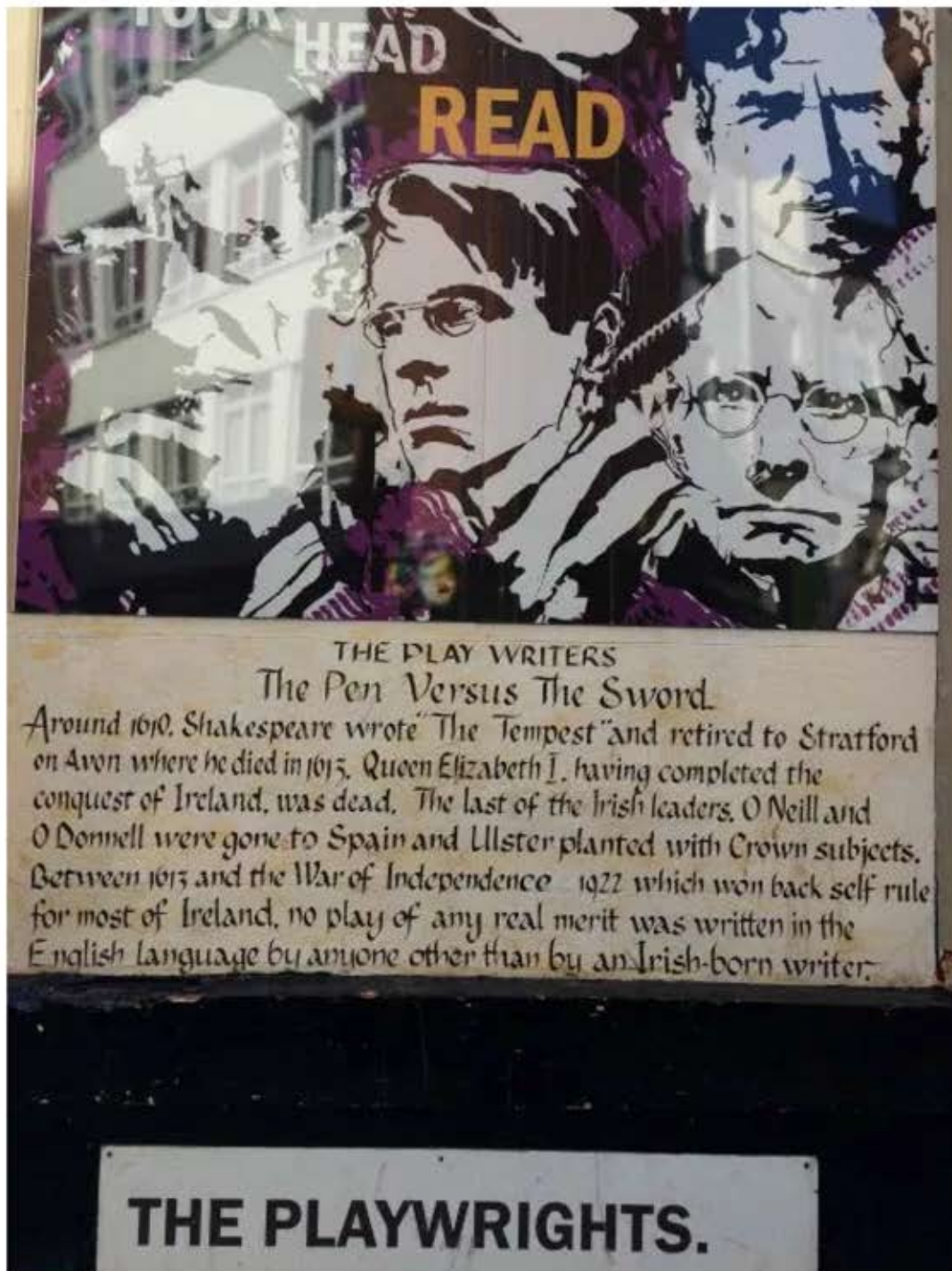
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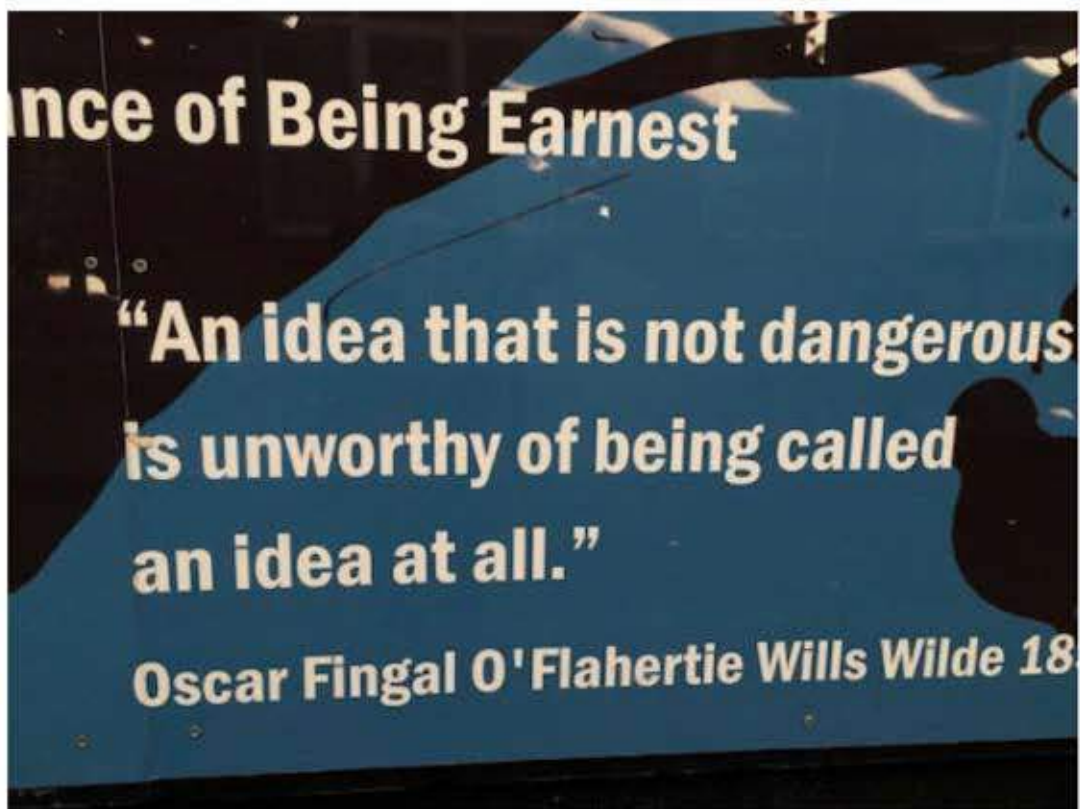
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The Irish produce great books, and have done so for centuries. Irish playwrights led the English-speaking world, the Icon Walk claims, as, "Between 1613 and War of Independence 1922, which won back self-rule for most of Ireland, no play of any real merit was written in the English language by anyone other than an Irish-born writer."

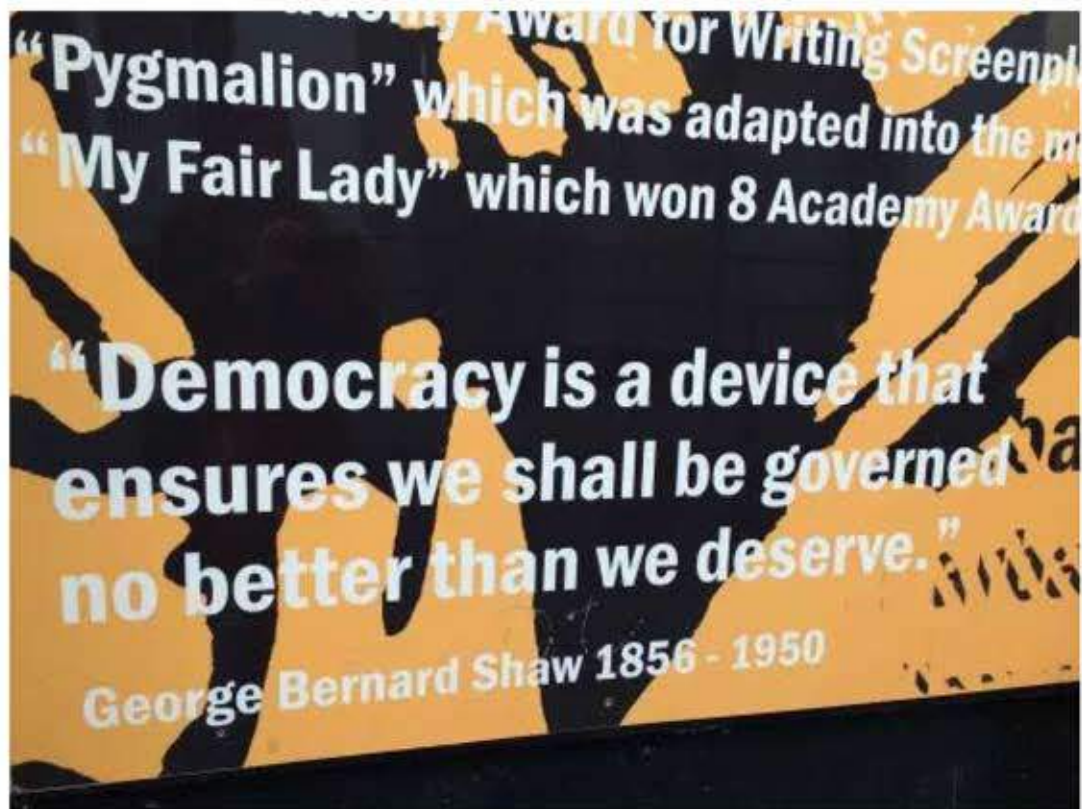


Nor did the playwrights stop in 1922. There's Oscar Wilde — proclaiming on the wall that, “An idea that is not dangerous is unworthy of being called an idea at all.”

Besides food for thought, another poster focuses on actual food, especially for children. In the early 1990s, the Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children “found that diet played an important role in educational achievement. The difference could be as much as five or more IQ points between those on high sugar, junk food diet in early life, compared with children given healthier diets with fruits, vegetables and home-cooked food.”

So — give the kids books and healthy food, and do it early. That was the guiding principle for the education bills in the Minnesota legislature this session, right?

No, wait — the legislature decided to be miserly in funding early education, and not to provide enough funding for the kids on the Head Start waiting list or the daycare sliding scale waiting lists. The special session promises to do more, but still not enough.



George Bernard Shaw's cynicism still works a century later and an ocean away. "Democracy is a device that ensure we shall be governed no better than we deserve." And on that note, more quotation offered by the Icon Walk artists, even though it's from a non-Irish source:

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Albert Einstein: "Only two things are infinite: The Universe and human stupidity, and I'm not sure about the former."

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For more on the special session, follow [Sally Jo Sorensen on Bluestem Prairie](#) or the #ThePeoplesSession on [Facebook](#) and Twitter. And for background on the special session, see

- [Four things you need to know about Minnesota's special session](#)
- [Beyond Pre-K: What MN schools need from the special session](#)
- [Buffer zones, bees and turkeys in the special session](#)
- [Three reasons Dayton should veto the environmental bill](#)

For more on the Icon Factory, [follow them on Facebook](#).

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## 2 responses to “*Brendan Behan, Dublin and the Minnesota legislature*”

### Alan Muller

June 11, 2015 at 9:13 am



The systemic failure of the Minnesota Legislature is now out for more people to see more clearly. Perhaps this is the only good to come of the present disgusting mess. Will significant demands for change emerge?



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### bernard phair

May 1, 2016 at 2:20 pm



Just was sent a copy of your comments from 10 months ago and was pleased with the intelligent way you used the contents of the Icon Walk. Do not know when you visited the walk but we extended it recently. I am sending one panel on Ireland's forgotten women writers, there are a further 6 panels and a panel from a new wall tracing the history of Irish culture from The Famine through 1916 showing the power of ideas rather than bullets. There is a small section (last 33%) dealing with some of the ideas of the actors involved in 1916 that seemed to die when they did. Feel free to use any of it that might advance the cause of human civility.



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